



TMJ Disorders



American Association of
Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons
9700 W Bryn Mawr Ave
Rosemont, IL 60018-5701
847 678.6200 800 822.6637
847 678.6286 fax

aaoms.org

The American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS), the professional organization representing more than 9,000 oral and maxillofacial surgeons in the United States, supports its members' ability to practice their specialty through education, research and advocacy. AAOMS members comply with rigorous continuing education requirements and submit to periodic office anesthesia evaluations.



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Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons: An Important Link

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons are the only recognized dental specialists who, after completing dental school, are surgically trained in an American Dental Association-accredited hospital-based residency program for a minimum of four years. They train alongside medical residents in internal medicine, general surgery and anesthesiology, and also spend time in otolaryngology, plastic surgery, emergency medicine and other specialty areas.

Their training focuses almost exclusively on the hard (ie, bone) and soft (ie, skin, muscle) tissue of the face, mouth, and jaws. Their knowledge and surgical expertise uniquely qualify them to diagnose and treat the functional and esthetic conditions in this anatomical area. The scope of oral and maxillofacial surgery practice includes, among others:

- Outpatient Anesthesia
- Dentoalveolar Surgery to manage diseases of the teeth and their supporting soft and hard tissues
- Surgical Correction of Maxillofacial Skeletal Deformities
- Cleft and Craniofacial Surgery
- Facial Trauma Surgery
- Temporomandibular Joint Surgery
- Pathologic Conditions, such as head and neck cancer
- Facial Reconstructive Surgery
- Facial Cosmetic Surgery

For more information on oral and maxillofacial surgery, or to find a surgeon in your community, visit aaoms.org, or call the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons at 800/822-6637.

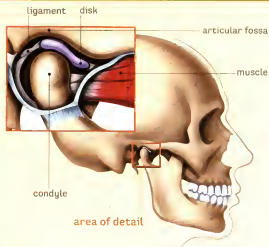


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TMJ disorders are not uncommon and have a variety of symptoms. Patients may complain of earaches, headaches and limited ability to open their mouth. They may also complain of clicking or grating sounds in the joint, and feel pain when opening and closing their mouth.



Anatomy of the TMJ



The TMJ is a hinge and gliding joint and is the most constantly used joint in the body. The round upper end of the lower jaw, or the movable portion of the joint, is called the condyle; the socket is called the articular fossa. Between the condyle and the fossa is a disk made of cartilage that acts as a cushion to absorb stress and allows the condyle to move easily when the mouth opens and closes.

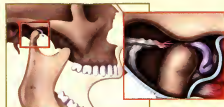
Function of the TMJ



Temporomandibular joint — Normal closed position. Jawbone is separated from skull by a soft disk that acts as a cushion when you chew, speak or swallow.



Temporomandibular joint — Normal open position. Disk stays in place when jaw is in use.



Temporomandibular joint — Abnormal. Disk is pulled forward when jaw is in use, causing the bone structures to grind together.

What Causes TMJ Disorders?

Determining the cause of a TMJ problem is important, because it is the cause that guides the treatment. One cause of TMJ symptoms is arthritis, which may result from an injury or from grinding your teeth at night. Another common cause of a TMJ disorder is the displacement or dislocation of the disk that is located between the jawbone and the socket. A displaced disk may produce clicking or popping sounds, limit jaw movement and cause pain when the mouth is opened and closed. The disk can also develop a hole or perforation, which can produce a grating sound when the joint is moved. Other conditions, such as trauma or rheumatoid arthritis, can cause the parts of the TMJ to fuse, preventing jaw movement altogether.

The Joint, the Muscles or Both are the Problem

Stress may trigger pain in the jaw muscles that is very similar to that caused by TMJ problems. Affected patients frequently clench or grind their teeth at night causing painful spasms in the muscles and difficulty in moving the jaw. Patients may also experience a combination of muscle and joint problems. This is why diagnosing TMJ disorders can be complex and may require different diagnostic procedures.

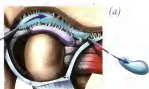
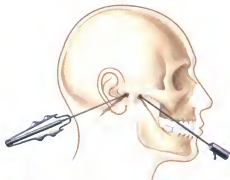




Treatment Options for TMJ Disorders



Bite splints or guards are commonly used to treat TMJ disorders.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Some of the TMJ surgical options your OMS may consider include (a) Arthrocentesis — flushing fluid from the joint and gently stretching it. (b) Arthroscopy — using a miniature telescoping instrument to diagnose and repair the joint. (c) Arthrotomy — open joint surgery for more complex cases.

The Role of the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon

When symptoms of TMJ trouble appear, an oral and maxillofacial surgeon should be consulted. A specialist in the areas of the mouth, teeth and jaws, the oral and maxillofacial surgeon is uniquely educated and trained to correctly diagnose the problem.

Range of Possible Treatment

TMJ treatment ranges from conservative dental and medical care to complex surgery. Depending on the diagnosis, treatment may include short-term, non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory drugs for pain and muscle relaxation, a bite plate or splint therapy, and even stress management counseling. Generally, if non-surgical treatment is unsuccessful or if there is clear joint damage, surgery may be indicated. Surgery can involve either arthroscopy (the method identical to the orthopaedic procedures used to inspect and treat larger joints such as the knee) or repair of damaged tissue by a direct surgical approach. Once TMJ disorders are correctly diagnosed, appropriate treatment can be provided.

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons are an important link in the referral network for primary care providers. To find an oral and maxillofacial surgeon in your community, visit the "Find a Surgeon" database at aaoms.org, or call the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons at 800/822-6637.